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23 JUL 1986

Mr. Luis A. Cutierrez
Alderman
City Council
City of Chicago
Council Chamber
City Hall, Room 200
121 N. LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Dear Mr. Cutierrez:

Thank you for your letter dated June 24, 1986. Before addressing your concerns, I would like to take this opportunity to inform you of the cleanup status at the A-Chem site.

All of the acid drums (83 drums, approximately 1/3 of the total drums on-site) and some base drums were disposed of at Chem Clear before July 4, 1986. The pH of all drums remaining on the site is above 7. The potential for reactions between the acids and bases has been eliminated. On July 7, 1986, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) started to decontaminate the building debris. The decontamination and disposal of the building debris were completed on July 14, 1986. On July 11, 1986, another 77 drums were disposed of at Chem Clear. The rinse water from decontamination of the building debris was collected and disposed of at an approved facility. During the removal of the building debris, an additional seventy-five 5-gallon pails (approximately 40 of them were chromic acid, the remaining were neutral and basic materials) were discovered on July 11, 1986. These 5-gallon pails were located in the office's closets and were completely isolated from all the drums on the facility. All of the seventy-five 5-gallon pails were removed and disposed of on July 16, 1986. We are arranging disposal of the remaining 136 drums. Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) approved disposal facilities are at a premium, and the process could take as long as 1 1/2 - 2 months. I assure you that every effort will be made to dispose of the drums as quickly as possible. Until all the drums can be disposed of from the A-Chem site, the U.S. EPA will maintain 24-hour security at the site to ensure that the site remains secure and that there is no risk to the neighboring community.

WJH. 7/28/86

WJH
7/23

In regard to your request that the U.S. EPA conduct appropriate tests, including soil tests, in the neighborhood adjacent to the A-Chem site to determine possible contamination of the neighborhood, I share your concern for public health; and I feel strongly that some soil testing should be conducted. Soil samples have been collected and analyzed for chromium and cyanide by the State's Attorney General's Office. This soil sampling has not found any severe levels of contamination. The On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) does not believe that any significant contamination of the neighborhood occurred as a result of the two fires, except for the chromium contaminated fire fighting water that flowed off the site during January. This material was removed.

The operator of the facility informed us that all the cyanide drums were in the south room at the time of the January fire, and that they were not affected by the fire, due to the fire wall between the north and south rooms. The acids found in the burnt-out room consisted of small quantities of hydrochloric acid (HCl), sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4), and nitric acid (HNO_3); and the majority of acids found were chromic acid (sulfuric acid mixed with dichromates). Other materials found included sodium hydroxide (NaOH) and ammonium chloride (NH_4Cl). We do not believe any toxic fumes were generated during the fire from the reaction of acids, bases and firewater, which would be hazardous to the public health, other than the dense smoke generated by the fire.

The OSC checked all the drums and the debris with a cyanide test kit, and all results were negative. This confirmed the information provided by the operator that cyanides were not affected by the fire.

The chromic acid contaminated firewater samples were analyzed by the Metropolitan Sanitary District of Greater Chicago (MSD) for open discharging in January 1986. The MSD informed the U.S. EPA that only slight traces of chromium were detected in the samples, and approval for discharge into the sewers was granted. The MSD's standards for open discharge are a maximum of 25 parts per million (ppm) total chromium or a maximum of 10 ppm hexavalent chromium.

During the response in January 1986, the ground was frozen; a layer of ice 3-4 inches thick was on top of the ground; and the temperature on January 26, 1986, was approximately -15°F . The chromic acid contaminated firewater was removed from the ice layer after leaving the facility. The discolored ice was removed from the neighborhood adjacent to A-Chem and the surrounding streets. Since the ground was frozen and there was a layer of ice underneath the stained ice, there is virtually no possibility that the ground was contaminated by this discharge.

Despite all the above facts indicating that the ground was not contaminated by the discharge, a limited soil sampling program for chromium will be initiated at locations where the contaminated discharge was removed.

I am grateful for the support provided by you and your staff throughout this cleanup effort. If you have any additional questions regarding U.S. EPA's cleanup effort at the A-Chem site, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Valdas V. Adamkus
Regional Administrator

cc: EPA w/control
M. Canavan
C. Kavcic

Wu:mw:7/7/86:disk #7:CONTROL ORA-301

for J. Thompson
1/23/86

pw 7/23/86